

INTRODUCTION

One objective of the Virtual Institute for Microbial Stress and Survival (VIMSS) and the Environmental Stress Pathway Project (ESPP) is to determine the genetic and physiological bases for cooperative and competitive interactions among environmental microbial populations of relevance to the DOE. The ESPP Applied Environmental Core (AEC) and Functional Genomics Core (FGC) have identified a number of genes that may participate in cooperative interactions between sulfate reducers and methanogens under low sulfate conditions.

The Deltaproteobacterium *D. vulgaris* is able to grow in the absence of an electron acceptor via syntrophy with hydrogenotrophic organisms. Despite decades of research, energy conservation in *D. vulgaris* is not well understood. The presence of multiple hydrogenases, including many located in the periplasm in all studied *Desulfovibrio* strains - and the observation that hydrogen is produced and then consumed during growth with lactate and sulfate (Tsuiji & Yagi, 1980) - lead to the formulation of the hydrogen cycling hypothesis as a mechanism for energy conservation (Odom & Peck, 1981). The completed genome sequence of *D. vulgaris* Hildenborough has since revealed genes for at least six different hydrogenases: four periplasmic and two cytoplasmic. Although several have been partially characterized biochemically and genetically, their roles in *D. vulgaris* under different growth conditions remain mostly undefined.

One of the membrane-bound hydrogenases, Ech, is very similar to a proton pumping hydrogenase from *Pyrococcus furiosus* DSM 3638 (Sapra *et al.*, 2004) and *Thermoanaerobacter tengcongensis* (Soboh *et al.*, 2004). It was suggested that a role for the Ech of DvH is hydrogen production using ferredoxin as a redox partner (Pohorelec *et al.*, 2002; Rodrigues *et al.*, 2003).

In this work we examined the growth and metabolite production of an *echA* (DVU0434) *D. vulgaris* Hildenborough mutant under three different growth conditions: i) in medium amended with lactate and sulfate and ii) in medium amended with acetate, hydrogen and sulfate, and iii) in coculture with the hydrogenotrophic methanogen *Methanococcus maripaludis*, lacking an electron acceptor.

MATERIALS and METHODS

D. vulgaris was grown on a B30 medium in 25 ml Balch tubes at 30 psi with either a 80% N₂: 20% CO₂ or 80% H₂: 20% CO₂ gas mixture in the headspace volume of approximately 15 ml. The basal B30 medium (pH 7.2) contained (per liter): 0.25g NaCl, 5.5 g MgCl₂·6H₂O, 0.1g CaCl₂·2H₂O, 0.5g NH₄Cl, 0.1g KCl, 1.4g Na₂SO₄, 25mM NaHCO₃, 5.75mM K₂HPO₄, 0.001g resazurine, 0.078g Na₂S·9 H₂O, 1ml Thauer's vitamins of (containing per liter 0.02g biotin, 0.02g folic acid, 0.1g pyridoxine HCl, 0.05g thiamine HCl, 0.05g riboflavin, 0.05g nicotinic acid, 0.05g DL pantothenic acid, 0.05g p-aminobenzoic acid, 0.01g vitamin B12), 1ml of trace minerals (per liter: 1.0g FeCl₂·4H₂O, 0.5g MnCl₂·4H₂O, 0.3g CoCl₂·4H₂O, 0.2g ZnCl₂, 0.05g Na₂MoO₄·4H₂O, 0.02g H₃BO₃, 0.1g NiSO₄·6H₂O, 0.002g CuCl₂·2H₂O, 0.006g Na₂SeO₃·5H₂O, 0.008g Na₂WO₄·2H₂O). This basal medium was amended with lactate and sulfate for growth in mono-culture or co-culture.

The concentration of organic acids and inorganic ions (sulfate, phosphate) in culture fluids were determined using a Dionex 500 system equipped with an AS11HC column. In some cases the concentration of organic acids was also measured on an HPLC equipped with a HPX 78 (Bio-Rad) column. Hydrogen concentrations were determined with a RGD2 Reduction Gas Detector (Trace Analytical) with 60/80 MOLE SIEVE 5A column (6' X 1/8") with N₂ as carrier gas. The concentration of methane and carbon dioxide was measured on a GC equipped with a TCD and "80/100 HAYESEP Q" column (6' X 1/8") with helium as carrier gas.

The *echA* was deleted, generating the mutant JW380.

Figure 1.

echABCDEF operon in wild type *D. vulgaris*



echA deletion mutant (JW380)

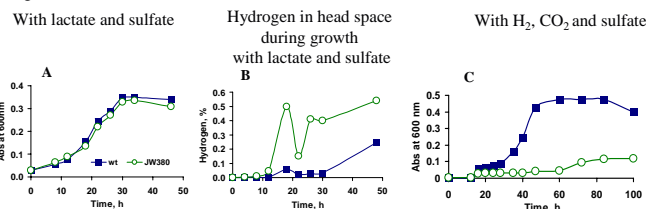


Genes coding for membrane proteins are shown in blue
Genes coding for soluble cytosolic proteins are in green

RESULTS

Growth of *D. vulgaris* JW380 monoculture

Figure 2.



RESULTS

Growth of *D. vulgaris* JW380 in syntrophic association with *M. maripaludis* without sulfate

Figure 3.

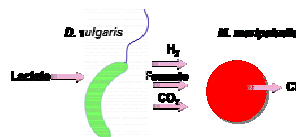
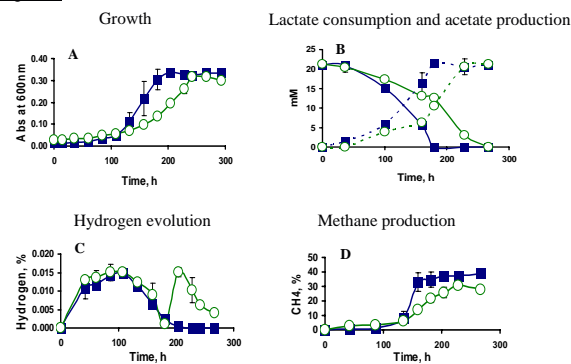


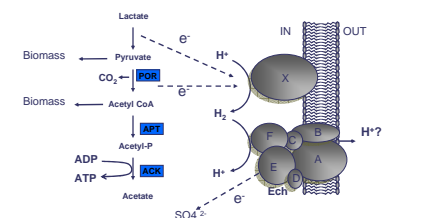
Figure 4.



SUMMARY

On lactate, the mutant demonstrated a growth rate and yield comparable to the wild type strain, but evolved more hydrogen as measured by its accumulation in the headspace during growth in batch culture (Figure 2A and B). A coculture consisting of the mutant strain and a hydrogenotrophic methanogen (*M. maripaludis*) demonstrated only slightly reduced growth rate and increased hydrogen accumulation in stationary phase when lactate was consumed relative to the wild type (Figure 4). This suggested a minor role of Ech in energy conservation during syntrophic growth. The hypothetical mechanism of hydrogen oxidation under these two growth conditions are shown on Figure 5.

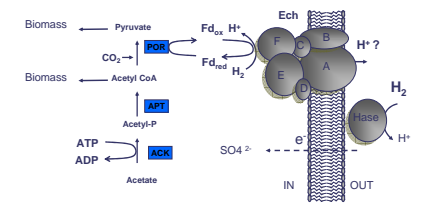
Figure 5. Growth of *D. vulgaris* on Lactate and Sulfate or in syntrophy with methanogen



X – unknown cytoplasmic hydrogenase; POR – pyruvate oxidoreductase;
APT – acetyl phosphotransferase; ACK – acetate kinase

In a medium containing acetate and an atmosphere of H₂/CO₂, growth of the mutant was severely impaired relative to the wild type (Figure 2C). Thus, the available data suggest that the primary role of the Ech hydrogenase is oxidation of hydrogen during sulfate respiration, possibly also contributing to the production of reduced ferredoxin required for conversion of Acetyl CoA to pyruvate by pyruvate oxidoreductase, as was previously demonstrated for the homologous hydrogenases in *M. barkeri* and *M. maripaludis* (Meur *et al.*, 2002; Porat *et al.*, 2006). The hypothetical mechanism of hydrogen oxidation under this growth condition are shown on Figure 6.

Figure 6. Growth of *D. vulgaris* on Hydrogen and Sulfate



Hase – periplasmic hydrogenase(s)

Additional information on function of another hydrogenases in *D. vulgaris* you can find on Poster #59

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

ESPP is part of the Virtual Institute for Microbial Stress and Survival supported by the U. S. Department of Energy, Office of Science, Office of Biological and Environmental Research, Genomics:GTL Program through contract DE-AC02-05CH11231 between Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory and the U. S. Department of Energy.